

# Working Women Need Paid Sick Days

FACT SHEET

More than a third (37 percent) of working women—more than 13 million—in businesses with 15 or more employees are not able to take a paid sick day when they or a family member are ill.

- Low-wage workers—the majority of whom are women—are less likely to have paid sick days. Two-thirds of low income workers making \$10.63 per hour or less don't have access to paid sick time.
- The industries that are often women-dominated are among the *least likely* to offer paid sick days. For example, nearly three-quarters of child care workers (72 percent) and food service workers (73 percent) lack access to paid sick time.<sup>1</sup>

Working women are more likely to have significant family care giving responsibilities, including caring for elderly parents, children or ill partners and spouses. As a result, women are left with no choice but to forego pay in order to meet their family's health care responsibilities.

- Two-thirds (64 percent) of mothers work outside the home, and women's earnings make up a substantial share of family income.<sup>2</sup> And, 76 percent of African American women, 67 percent of Asian American women and 61 percent of Latinas with children under 18 are in the labor force.<sup>3</sup>
- One in three working women report that they provide care for an elderly relative, for persons with disabilities or for special needs children.<sup>4</sup>
- Four in five mothers (80 percent) are primarily responsible for selecting their children's doctors and accompanying children to appointments.<sup>5</sup>

Women often lose pay or risk losing their jobs to care for a sick child, and low-wage working women are the most likely to suffer financially.

- Half of working mothers miss work when their child gets sick. And of these mothers, half do not get paid when they take this time off. Among low-income working mothers, two in three report losing pay.<sup>6</sup>
- One in eight women (13 percent) and one in five women with children (20 percent) reported that they or a family member had been fired or disciplined by an employer for taking time off to cope with an illness or care for a sick child or family member.<sup>7</sup>

Working women need a basic workplace standard of paid sick days so they don't have to choose between keeping their job and caring for a sick child or an ailing family member.

- Currently, no state or federal law guarantees paid sick days. San Francisco, Washington, DC, and Milwaukee have already passed laws guaranteeing paid sick days to workers in their cities. However, illness—and especially pandemics like the H1N1 flu—doesn't have geographic boundaries. We need a national paid sick days standard to protect all working people.
- The Healthy Families Act (H.R. 2460/S. 1152) would enable workers to earn up to seven paid sick days a year to recover from short-term illness, to care for a sick family member and to seek routine medical care.

---

<sup>1</sup> Joint Economic Committee, *Expanding Access to Paid Sick Leave: The Impact of the Healthy Families Act on America's Workers*, March 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Heather Boushey and Ann O'Leary, eds. *The Shriver Report: A Woman's Nation Changes Everything*, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Women in the Labor Force: A Databook (2007 Edition), [www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-databook2007.htm](http://www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-databook2007.htm).

<sup>4</sup> Jody Heymann, *The Widening Gap: Why America's Working Families Are in Jeopardy—and What Can Be Done About It*, Basic Books, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, *Women and Health Care: A National Profile*, 2005, as cited in Institute for Women's Policy Research, "Women and Paid Sick Days: Crucial for Family Well-Being." 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Institute for Women's Policy Research. "Women and Paid Sick Days: Crucial for Family Well-Being." 2007, [www.iwpr.org/pdf/B254\\_paysickdaysFS.pdf](http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B254_paysickdaysFS.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Lake Research Partners telephone survey of 1,200 likely voters nationwide (2.8% margin of error), conducted June 20 – 27, 2007.

**For more information on paid sick days, visit [www.paid sick days.org](http://www.paid sick days.org).**

---

*The National Partnership for Women & Families is a non-profit, non-partisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, access to quality health care and policies that help women and men meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at [www.nationalpartnership.org](http://www.nationalpartnership.org).*

© 2010 National Partnership for Women & Families  
All rights reserved.